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African Politics, African Peace charts an agenda for peace in Africa, focusing on how the African Union can implement its norms and use its instruments to prevent and resolve armed conflicts. It is an independent report of the World Peace Foundation, supported by the African Union.

The Report is the most extensive review of the African Union's peace missions ever conducted. It is based on detailed case studies and cross-cutting research, and draws on consultations with leading experts, peacekeepers, and mediators.

This Paper is a summary of research undertaken in support of the Project.

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AU and UN Cooperation in Peace Operations in the Central African Republic

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Key Messages:

- While the AU is often more flexible in its deployment and its operations allow for more casualties than UN peace missions, the case of CAR shows that its added value goes beyond its willingness to endure losses. Its capacity to talk frankly amongst regional heads of state and its interest in long-term cross-border security are additional key advantages.
- The process of re-hatting troops from regional operations to UN operations needs to be improved. In CAR, many of the troops were merely inherited from previous deployments without systematic vetting and lacked adequate training and capacity.
- When a sub-region region is deeply divided, it cannot effectively enforce peace, even if it has been successful in brokering a negotiated settlement. Both the AU and UN need to improve their engagement with powerful regional players and Regional Economic communities to better navigate peace operations.
- Given the proliferation of regional and international missions in CAR, there was often no clarity of who was defining the overall political strategy. The lack of leadership clarity led to unclear political goals, which negatively impacted the relationship with the transitional government. Weaknesses in conflict analysis exacerbated this problem.

Introduction:

There is a long history of stewardship for successive conflicts in CAR that has alternated between the international community and the region. The African Union, regional economic communities (RECs), and regional leaders have played important roles during the many initiatives aimed at resolving conflict in CAR. This brief provides an overview of the UN-AU relationship, focusing on each organization's comparative advantages and highlighting areas for improvement. It further summarizes key lessons learned from AU-UN cooperation and regional interventions in the Central African Republic over the past several years.

UN-AU Cooperation in the Central African Republic

UN-AU cooperation has come a long way since the first international missions were deployed to the Central African Republic (CAR). Both organizations have grown stronger, with the ability to respond to similar crises, and both have developed different institutional strengths and weaknesses. Their respective comparative advantages are the basis for a stronger partnership. However, there is a need to improve institutional engagement in some areas, and learn from some key differences in how the AU and UN operate, deploy, and support peace missions.

At the highest levels, the evidence consistently points to the need for strengthened partnerships between the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the United Nations Security Council (SC). Although there have been some attempts to improve coordination, including annual consultations, there is a sense that SC members remain reluctant to give up powers. This lingering mistrust is extremely unproductive.

For example, the PSC has shown greater readiness to take risks in terms of deploying missions when the SC could not arrive at a consensus on what to do, or when action was blocked by a member of the P-5. The AU is generally more flexible in deployment and its operations allow for greater risk—its troop contributors are ready to withstand greater casualties. It also has the ability to deploy more quickly, often to environments where it is harder to maintain peace, and with stronger rules of engagement. It can sometimes provide a more localized and perhaps more comprehensive understanding of the conflict environment. It also has shown to be much more flexible than the UN in its management of peace missions. In some cases this allows for faster responses by its troop contingents.

While the UN may require more time to deploy, it is supported by a much longer history of peacekeeping experience, and a practiced approach to ensure its blue helmets are adequately supported by sufficient resources and training. This creates high expectations on the side of Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs), but also enables a more structured deployment. UN contingents are usually stronger in terms of numbers and capabilities, and also bring the added value of significantly stronger civilian components. This multidimensional approach can provide strong political direction and a more integrated response to complex conflict situations. Well-developed human rights units, civil affairs teams, gender advisers, and political affairs departments are all key parts of this type of operation.

Both the AU and UN face challenges in their engagement with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and both need to further develop their relationship with these bodies to better navigate peace operations. While the UN has chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which applies to the RECs as well as to the AU, the AU does not have an established mechanism for engaging with the RECs. To date, their engagement has mostly been on an ad-hoc basis, and often marked by competition.

It is imperative to get the politics right in peace interventions. The most important question, therefore, is

not necessarily who defines the nature of the conflict, but rather whether shared analysis can be the basis for AU-UN cooperation. However, perfectly synchronizing the two Councils is not realistic, nor should it be the objective. Rather, the goal should be to make the partnership more productive, and for both to benefit from their differences and comparative advantages.

Preliminary Lessons from UN-AU Engagement in CAR

Leveraging the AU's comparative advantage

The implicit model of AU-UN partnership in peace operations thus far positions the AU as a first responder until some measure of stabilization has been achieved or until the UN is ready to deploy. This was also the case in CAR. But while the AU is often more flexible in its deployment and its operations allow for more casualties, its added value goes beyond its willingness to endure losses. Its capacity to talk frankly amongst heads of states is also crucial – the UN is not organized to do this well. The AU would have been best placed to manage the regional dimension of the CAR crisis. A number of discussions would have happened more easily under AU leadership than between regional heads of state and the UN as the latter is still largely seen as an outsider.

The AU also has more systemic interest in diffusing situations and improving cross-border security – in that sense the AU could be a more lasting interlocutor than the UN. This is particularly important as external actors continue to prioritize quick-fix solutions, overly military approaches to stabilization and the promotion of elections at all costs over the broader structural needs of re-defining state/society responsibilities. In CAR, with each cycle of rebellion, international actors ran for the exits once the fighting subsided and displacement figures dropped.

Managing transitions

Another lesson from CAR is the need to better manage the process of re-hatting troops from regional operations to UN operations. In CAR, from MICOPAX (ECCAS-led)

to MISCA (AU-led) to MINUSCA (UN-led), each new peacekeeping intervention was an added layer on top of the previous one, as opposed to being a strategically thought-out operation. Many of the troops were merely inherited from a previous deployment and lacked adequate training and capacity. The current sexual abuse problems within MINUSCA are the result of this layered re-hatting, with insufficient vetting of legacy troops. Future operations will need to pay more attention to how these transitions are managed. They will also need to consider re-hatting in the other direction, e.g. from the UN to the AU.

On the positive side, the well-managed MISCA-MINUSCA handover demonstrated that close UN-AU cooperation, particularly at the Secretariat level, is possible. The biggest challenge of the transition was the AU capacity gap. The AU remains dependent on African contingents and what they can and cannot provide. It continues to face challenges in preparing African contingents and raising them to a higher operational level e.g. problems with equipment, training, and basic functioning.

The role of RECs and regional players

RECs, particularly the most powerful neighbors, have had a significant impact on AU-UN cooperation in CAR. The transition of MISCA from ECCAS leadership (dominated by Chad) to AU leadership created tensions with President Déby, which resulted in Chad's alienation from future peacekeeping operations and created challenges for the AU's role in MISCA. When a sub-region region is deeply divided, it cannot effectively enforce peace, even if it has been successful in brokering a negotiated settlement (or in the case of Chad and CAR, imposed a solution). Both the AU and UN face challenges in their engagement with the RECs, and both need to further develop their relationship with them to better navigate peace operations.

Financing

Financing continues to be an important weakness of AU-UN coordination on peace operations. However,

answers to this problem cannot be found at the Secretariat level, as funding decisions remain the prerogative of the member states. The UN Secretariat has been and can continue to be instrumental in short-term financing – e.g. it deployed a small UN team to support MISCA operations, providing experts, military and protection of civilians training.

Defining a Clear Political Strategy

The proliferation of peace operations in CAR also created confusion on the political side. Given the involvement of ECCAS, the AU, the UN and France, there was often no clarity of who was defining political strategy. MISCA was a purely military force and its political dimension was marginal. As a result, the mission never played a strong political role nor was it recognized as a leading political actor in the resolution of the crisis. The lack of leadership clarity led to unclear political goals, which impacted the relationship with transitional government and the expectations of the government.

A key shortcoming of both the region and international actors in CAR over the years has been the tendency to understand CAR through narratives developed elsewhere. It has been understood either through the lens of the Darfur crisis, threats to Chadian security, or the fight against the LRA. Mostly, each crisis in CAR was treated as if it were the first of its kind in the country. In the early stages of intervention for both the AU (MISCA) and the UN (MINUSCA), neither seemed prepared to understand the political situation on the ground. MINUSCA needed a much more robust operation back at UN headquarters to help with conflict analysis and recruitment.

Neither the AU nor the UN was willing or seemingly able to offer political alternatives to the strategic choices proposed by the French. This suggests that the AU's capacity gap is not only limited to troop preparedness, but also extends to weaknesses in conflict analysis, despite the huge potential for such analysis in the region. As such, it has often failed to assume political leadership in peace operations.

This report was made possible by a grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark with support from the World Peace Foundation. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the authors.

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